

# LEADERSHIP IN EXECUTIVE WOMEN FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCES: A STUDY IN THE REGION OF MADRID

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## Abstract

Today's knowledge society is creating increasingly competitive environments in which cognitive factors, creativity, knowledge and information determine the success of organizations. In this context the exercise of management and leadership is essential to achieve objectives, goals and relationships. Both concepts have been historically associated with the male domain because of the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions. However, the increasing participation of women in the workplace has led to the development of an extensive literature on the possible existence of differences between the styles of male and female leadership, although it has not been addressed from the analysis of competences associated with each sex. Through a participatory process the abilities and skills associated with women managers are analyzed, the differences in leadership styles and the barriers that still exist for the promotion of women into management positions. The results indicate that women particularly value the skills associated with human relationships, the female leadership style tends to be transformational and that there are still barriers to their advancement to management positions.

**Keywords:** *competences; project management; executive women; leadership; Madrid region*

## Resumen

La sociedad del conocimiento actual está creando entornos cada vez más competitivos en los que los factores cognitivos, creatividad, conocimiento e información determinan el éxito de las organizaciones. En este contexto es fundamental el ejercicio de la dirección y el liderazgo de manera conjunta para la consecución de los objetivos, metas y relaciones laborales. Ambos conceptos se han asociado históricamente al ámbito masculino por la escasa representación femenina en puestos directivos. Sin embargo, el aumento progresivo de la participación de la mujer en el ámbito laboral ha provocado el desarrollo de una bibliografía extensa sobre la posible existencia de diferencias entre los estilos de liderazgo femenino y masculino, si bien ésta no se ha abordado desde el análisis de las competencias asociadas a cada sexo. A través de un proceso participativo se analizan las habilidades y competencias asociadas a las mujeres directivas, las diferencias en los estilos de liderazgo, así como las barreras que aún persisten para el ascenso de las mujeres a puestos directivos. Los resultados indican que las mujeres valoran especialmente las competencias asociadas a las relaciones humanas, que el estilo de liderazgo femenino suele ser transformacional y que siguen existiendo barreras en su ascenso a puestos directivos.

**Palabras Clave:** *competencias; dirección de proyectos; mujer directiva; liderazgo; Comunidad de Madrid*

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a radical transformation of the economic structure of the "industrial society". The model based on material factors has been replaced by a production system dominated by symbolic factors and knowledge, characteristic of the actual so-called "knowledge society" (Krüger, 2006) creating increasingly competitive environments, which in turn lead to new models of organization. The wealth of companies in the "knowledge society" depends largely on cognitive factors, creativity, knowledge and information (Greenberg, Robertson & Stauffer, 2001; Krüger, 2006).

Given this system characterized by speed and constant change, several authors (Greenberg, Robertson & Stauffer, 2001; Burgess & Tharenou, 2002; Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Yang, Huang, & Wu, 2011) stress the importance of exercising management and leadership together to achieve the objectives, goals and working relations, as well as the need to adopt new management and leadership styles in order to deal successfully with a new economic scenario and ensure the competitiveness of companies in the new global economy.

Management and leadership are skills that until recent decades have not been analyzed in the literature from a gender perspective, due to the underrepresentation of women in both the labor market and executive positions (INE/Instituto de la Mujer, 2010). However, during the second half of the twentieth century, national and international commitments to equal rights and opportunities have generated great changes that have crystallized in a substantial improvement in the situation of women, especially in terms of access to education and the labor market. Numerous studies in Europe show that the participation of women in the workplace has been increasing steadily in recent decades, appreciating a decrease in unemployment rates and an increase in women employability rate (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008; European Commission, 2009; INE/ Instituto de la Mujer, 2010). These advances in the incorporation of women into the labor market have taken place in all areas, both in traditionally female fields and those with a majority of male presence. In the case of Spain, in 2009, only 32% of executive positions in the business sphere were held by women (INE, 2009). Since the incorporation of women into management positions in the last three decades an extensive bibliography has been developed (Druskat, 1994; Vinnicombe, 1995; Eagly & Johanesen-Schmidt, 2001; Ramos, Sarrió, Barberá, & Candela, 2002; Burgess & Tharenou, 2002; Cuadrado, Morales, & Recio, 2008; Castaño, 2009; Adams & Funk, 2010) about the existence of differences between the styles of male and female leadership, although this has not been addressed from the analysis of competences.

On the other hand, despite the increase of employability and more presence of women in all areas and professional sectors in both the public and private spheres, the proportion of women remains a minority or is even nonexistent as one ascends the pyramidal hierarchy (Barberá, Ramos, Sarrió, & Candela, 2002). This inequality increases the higher the workplace (European Commission, 2009). This has led numerous international research (Adams & Funk, 2010; Agut & Martín, 2007; Alexander & Ryan, 2008; Bass, Avolio, & Berson, 2003; Gonas & Bergman, 2009; R. Kanter, 1977; Kurgan, 2009; Maher K., 1997; Mills, Blackman, Headlam-Wells, Laws, & Matfin, 1998) to analyze the social and cultural barriers that hinder many women to promote and hold management positions. Among the external factors responsible for these barriers, Agut and Martín (2007:1) include "gender stereotypes, segregation of the labor market, employment discrimination, sexual and psychological harassment in the workplace, lower career development opportunities in the organization, the absence of established labor policy that favors reconciliation of work and family life and the difficulty to share domestic responsibilities and childcare". As for internal factors these authors point out low self-efficacy in traditionally male issues and their training, concentrated on areas traditionally considered feminine.

After the analysis of the international literature on executive women, the following research

hypothesis were established:

H1: There are certain management skills which personal development leads to an improvement in the exercise of leadership and a successful career in women.

H2: There are differences in leadership styles developed by women and men.

H3: There are certain barriers that limit and hinder the development of skills in women managers and women's access to such positions.

From this analysis measures and recommendations are proposed for improving training and professional advice to women to become agents of change for the company and for society.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology followed in the research is presented below, including the instruments used in the participatory process, the definition of the scope of the study and the selection and sample size.

### *Instruments used for data collection and scope of the research*

The scope of the study has focused on the context of executive women, defining "executive context" not only as that related to the business, but also other contexts in which the exercise of leadership lies in the performance of certain positions. As to the scope of the research, although the application is framed at the regional level, in Madrid region, we have reviewed national and international research to check the results of other relevant work performed.

The proposed methodology for the study is based on two complementary sources of information. First, we have reviewed secondary information sources such as research studies, government publications, statistics, scientific literature and international experiences in relation to the situation of women in the workplace, female leadership, management skills and professional skills as a strategy of equality and economic development.

Secondly, primary information has been obtained by applying two participatory tools: direct interviews and surveys to stakeholders (Patton, 1997; Whyte, 1991) in Madrid region. The interviews were structured in five areas: personal information (professional and academic), aspects and relevant skills in career, leadership styles and gender differences, the existence of barriers to women's career development and recommendations and support measures for women career advancement. The methodology of the survey was quantitative and it was conducted through questionnaires to companies. The blocks analyzed in the survey are related to the occupational structure, permanence, promotion and satisfaction with the internal hedge.

For the development and use of these instruments we have used a participatory and pluralistic approach (Leviton, 2001) in order to achieve greater involvement (Díaz-Puente, Cazorla, & De los Ríos, 2009) and linkage of the people involved (Chambers, 1994) so that they benefit the most from participating in the analysis of initiatives for skills empowerment and improvement of career paths of women managers (Díaz-Puente, Yagüe & Afonso, 2008). Furthermore, it was claimed that one of the main sources of information were the knowledge and experience of those involved (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Chambers, 1993; Rondinelli, 1993) and that through the participation process the agents would learn (Preskill & Torres, 1999) and identify best practices to guide possible measures to improve the actions (Korten, 1980; Uphoff, 1985).

To apply these instruments we had the cooperation of Madrid regional Government—Department of Employment, Women and Immigration— within a research program to improve employability (Panorama Laboral).

### *Selection and sample size*

To conduct the interviews, 52 executive women were selected from Madrid region. The selection was conducted to cover different agencies from the following areas: (1) private enterprises, which is the main context for performance of management and leadership, (2) associations linked to businesswomen, researchers, or related to equality of opportunities, (3) training, where we have considered the leading business schools with a long and distinguished tradition in the training of managers, leadership and managerial skills and competencies as well as consultancy specialized in women's leadership issues and personal development, (4) public, which includes the various public administrations as well as existing organizations concerned with education and gender equity, and (5) academic and researcher fields that apart from academia, include governing bodies of universities, schools, colleges and research centers.

Regarding the survey, it reached a total of 950 companies in Madrid, selected within a study to prospect the occupations of Madrid region (Panorama Laboral, 2010). Concerning the design of the survey sample, the target population consists of the set of all businesses in the region of Madrid with more than five employees and includes the most representative economic activities, defined as those with more than five thousand workers. Stratified random sampling was used as a function of economic activity and size of the company. In addition to the 950 companies a total of ten companies that are not part of the first analysis, called "self-represented" have been included in the sample, due to their specific activity and the large number of jobs created and have received a special treatment in the identification of training.

## **3. Research results**

The results presented below correspond primarily to the analysis of managerial skills associated with women. Secondly, an overview of leadership styles and the differences associated with gender are presented. The third section discusses the existence of potential barriers that limit the development of management skills among women.

The respondent's profile is a woman aged between 35-45 years, with university education, knowledge of a second language (45%), who has studied and worked in Spain (36%), married (74%), with dependents –mainly children– (50% have more than one child and 20% have a child) and 10-20 years of professional experience.

As for the companies surveyed, most are small and micro enterprises (26% and 52% respectively). The activities fall mainly in the services sector (74%) and 56% claim to have women employed in managerial positions (52%) preferably between 31 and 50 years old (82%).

### **3.1. Executive competencies and skills of women**

The results obtained in this research show that there are some differences between men and women in the rating given to leadership skills.

The women managers interviewed consider that the following aspects have influenced their own executive development and career (Table 1): the management capacity and skills (18%), the ability to understand and adapt to new contexts and professional demands (18%) and personal motivation and commitment to advance professionally (18%). Other factors and skills that women managers feel that have influenced to a lesser extent are: their academic

education (16%) and the quota measures taken for the equilibrium of men and women (6%), an aspect mainly considered in the public sector.

**Table 1: The most valued aspects by executive women from Madrid to contribute to their development and career**

Aspects	%
Her ability to understand and adapt to the professional demands in every moment	19
Her professional / managerial training	18
Her desire / drive / determination to advance professionally	18
Her graduate/ post-graduate education	16
Her knowledge of languages	13
Her feminine nature. Her ability to use different skills to those of her male environment	11
The existence of quotas to support the presence of women in business / institutions	6

In the case of Madrid's business community, the most influential attributes in the career of the executive women in the companies surveyed are experience, commitment to business and career.

However, there are some differences in the ratings by type of activity performed by the company. In the case of construction companies and service sector, the most valued aspects (100%) for professional development and promotion of women within the company are commitment and loyalty to the organization. Other important aspects considered are experience (91%) and academic education (88%). Enterprises engaged in industrial activity value more the experience (93%), knowledge of languages (89%) and training (85%), but also consider relevant the commitment to the company (77%).

In relation to company size, there are slight differences in the evaluation of the aspects; the smaller the size of the company, the greater value to personal skills –mainly commitment–, and the lower the valuation of the aspects related to curriculum and career experience. In large companies the most influential attributes are related to aspects of the curriculum: experience (97%), training and career (89%). Midsize companies, in addition to the experience (93%) and career (88%), highlight the commitment to the company (84%) and small business stress commitment (90%), training (80%) and career (84%).

In terms of competences and skills that have played a major role throughout their careers, the executive women interviewed emphasize personal skills related to human factors, especially those related to teamwork, empathy and personal relationships (91%), negotiation skills for consensus building (89%), team development (86%), problem solving (86%), customer orientation (84%) and creativity (83%).

Generally speaking the skills identified by the managers interviewed and the surveyed companies for women career advancement can be grouped according to three dimensions –contextual, behavioral and technical skills– defined internationally (IPMA, 2006). These

skills are assessed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Importance of competences for professional development of executive women**

<b>Competence group</b>	<b>Competences</b>	<b>%</b>
Context	Customer focus (commercial capacity)	84
	Business vision (strategic vision)	78
Behaviour	Empathy / interpersonal relationships	91
	Negotiation skills to find solutions that get support of others	89
	Ability to develop competent and motivated people (team development / coaching)	86
	Creativity	83
	The ability to lead / enthusiasm / motivate	80
	Having a good professional/personal network (networking)	78
	Personal / emotional balance	76
	Initiative / proactivity	76
	Self-criticism capacity	74
Technical	Efficacy / productivity	86
	Be an example for others (create work culture)	81
	Ability to communicate efficiently both oral and written	79
	Constantly seek improvement / innovation search	78
	Ability to manage risk and make decisions in a context of uncertainty	77
	Ability to overcome obstacles (solution searching / problem solving)	76
	Ability to delegate to others	75
	Effective and efficient management of resources	73
	Organizational capacity / efficient time management	71

Comparing the results as women managers work in the private or public sector, there are some differences, due to the characteristics of each sector. The executive women working in the private sector highlight the following skills: customer focus, commercial ability, business vision capacity (strategic vision), relational capacity (personal and professional networks), creativity, continuous improvement ability (search for excellence and innovation), organizational and planning skills (efficient time management), higher efficiency (productivity at work), and communication skills (oral and written). Instead the executive women in the public domain emphasize more the following skills: ability to manage risk and make decisions in a context of uncertainty, self-critical capacity, capacity for problem solving, ability to delegate, leadership, enthuse and motivate others, initiative (proactivity), negotiating skills and solutions searching, effective and efficient management of resources. In the experience of the interviewees, often economic incentives and increased availability of resources are more characteristic of private sector than public sector so in the latter there is a greater use of other skills such as motivation and an effective and efficient management to ensure the achievement of objectives.

Regarding the importance of the competences that executive women consider most influential in their career progression (Table 3), these include the ones related to human factors and especially the ability to create teams.

**Table 3: Relevance of the most influential competences in the promotion of executive women in Madrid (%)**

<b>Competences</b>	<b>%</b>
Team Building	14
Empathy	8
Personal and professional motivation	8
Leadership	7
Ability to overcome obstacles	7
Ability to communicate	5
Networking	5
Effective and efficient resource management	5
Work capacity	5
Initiative	5
Sense of responsibility	5
Self-criticism	5
Search for innovation	4
Customer Orientation	3
Organizational capacity	2
Medium and long term strategic visión	2
negotiation	2
Academic education	2
Global vision of the situation	2
Creativity	2

### **3.2. Leadership styles between women and men**

The classic research has focused (see, for example, Eagy & Johnson, 1990) in the identification and definition of autocratic leadership styles versus democratic and task oriented / relationship-oriented (Cuadrado, 2003). However, in recent years the concepts of transactional leadership and transformational leadership have captured the attention of the research in this area (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bono & Judge, 2003) and have been associated with male and female respectively (Castaño, 2009). Transactional leadership, widespread in today's business culture is characterized by the establishment of a sort of "exchange" between the leader and group members. This figure is the one who guides or motivates, by reward and punishment, his followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying the roles and tasks necessary to achieve them (Cuadrado, Morales, & Recio, 2008).

By contrast, in the exercise of transformational leadership lies the establishment of a relationship of mutual stimulation between leader and followers. This stimulation results in a

transformation in the scale of values, attitudes and beliefs of their followers, motivating them to reach much higher levels of performance than initially expected and therefore, higher levels of job satisfaction (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, Avolio, & Berson, 2003; Cuadrado, Morales, & Recio, 2008; Pedraja-Rejas, Rodriguez-Ponce, & Rodriguez-Ponce, 2006). The key factors that make up transformational leadership is the leader's charisma, motivation or inspiration that generates the leader, the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Given the two major styles of leadership, the literature is divided between the authors that consider that these styles incorporate features and behaviors traditionally labeled as male or female (Rosener, 1990; Druskat, 1994, Eagly & Johanesen-Schmidt, 2001, Ramos, Sarrió, Barberá, & Candela, 2002 among others) and who, by contrast, believe that these characteristics are distributed randomly among managers and do not necessarily respond as a management style of men or women (Lopez-Zafra & Morales, 1998, Lopez-Zafra & del Olmo, 1999; Maher, 1997).

In the first case, several authors (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Vinnicombe, 1995, Burgess & Tharenou, 2002) argue that women are more "transformational" than men, while men exert a more "transactional" leadership style, probably influenced by the different way men and women have of perceiving the world: the former perceive it as a "hierarchical social order" while women see it as a "connection network". They also claim that those skills related to emotions and relationships are more developed and implemented by women. It is noted that women show greater social awareness, philanthropic instinct, exercise the power more by reaching consensus and with a more horizontal trend in the hierarchy. Cuadrado, Morales, & Recio (2008) argue that experimental investigations carried out suggest that companies with more women directors could show a behavior focused on concern for others. In the same vein, Adams & Funk (2010) argue that women managers seem to adopt the values that precede the ethical decisions more strongly than male directors.

Approaches that consider the management style is independent of gender are based on the consideration that there are not many differences between men and women managers, who share relatively random characteristics, skills and behaviors. Thus, in some studies of men and women they do not seem to differ in their leadership styles (Lopez-Zafra & del Olmo, 1999; Maher, 1997), the differences are not consistent (Lopez-Zafra & Morales, 1998) or the results vary depending on the position held by the leader and / or depending on who performs the evaluations: superiors and leaders vs. subordinates (Carless, 1998). Other authors such as Pounder & Coleman, (2002) argue that the complexity of the organizations leads to multi-dimensional leadership styles.

Given the gender differences in the exercise of leadership and management, 79.3% of respondents argued that men and women lead differently, while 20.7% reported no difference by being a man or female. We performed a classification of the differences most mentioned by those interviewed that considered the existence of gender-related differences (Table 4).

In relation to women, most have stressed as positive features empathy, proper time management, multitasking ability, communication and closeness, which relates to the ability to establish more horizontal relationships and the ability to work in team encouraging participation. However, the effects and consequences of other aspects identified as: search for consensus, global vision, sensitivity to attend to personal matters of other members of their work environment and consider the individuality of people with whom they work, the ability to self-criticism and receive criticism or the sharing of success and flexibility were considered positive or negative depending on the circumstances.

In relation to men, there have been highlighted as positive qualities: self-determination for considering a target and direct all their efforts to achieve it, the strategic vision,



entrepreneurship, the rationality that allows professional performance without emotional costs, participation in the circuit of informal social networks and "self-marketing."

As in the case of women, other aspects mentioned as individualism, ambition, concentration capacity, ability to take risks and make decisions could be considered positive characteristics or weaknesses depending on the circumstances. There is some agreement between the interviewees about the differences between men and women in regard to professional ambition. 51% of respondents said they pretty well agree that women do not perform professionally seeking the same goals to which men aspire and 41% strongly agreed that executive women give less value to the importance of the positions than the content of the work they perform. In relation to decision making and ability to manage risk, respondents reported that men tend to need less information and parameters to decide and usually take more risks. Risk taking encourages the chance to advance, innovate, etc. But risk-taking by omitting certain factors can lead to complex and negative consequences.

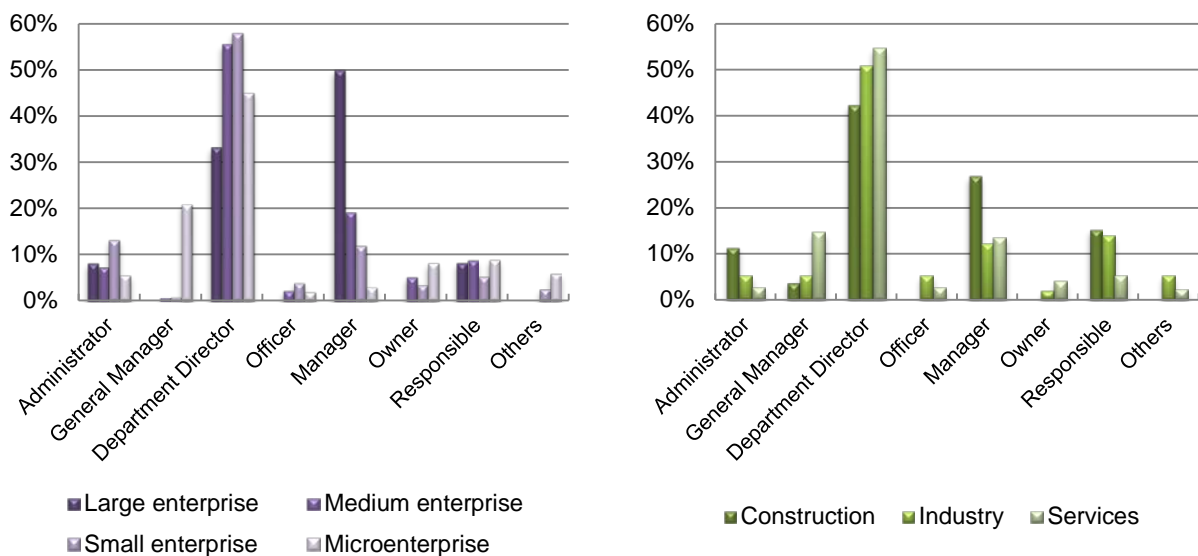
**Table 4. Differences in leadership and management style between men and women**

Outstanding features in women	Outstanding features in men
Empathy	Individualism
Human Factor	Rationality
Emotionality / Sensitivity	Self-determination
Teamwork	Ambition
Participation	Ability to separate professional from personal issues
Global vision	Concentration capacity
Time Management	Ability to take risks
Consideration of the human factor	Prominence / Visibility
Flexibility	Strategic Vision
Consensus	Fond of hierarchy
Closeness	Entrepreneurs
Ability to establish more horizontal relationships	Authoritarianism / aggressiveness
Self-criticism capacity and ability to receive criticisms	Informal social networks
Multitask	Decision Making
Communication	Self-marketing
Distribution of the success / Invisibility	

### 3.3.

In the case of the Madrid companies, the presence of women in positions of responsibility focuses on the medium type positions –"Department Management", "Management" and "Responsible"– regardless of company size and type of productive activity, and the percentage of women managers decreases as the level in the hierarchy of the organizational structure increases. In both cases (depending on the size of the company and by activity) it is highlighted the absence or low presence of women in senior positions –"General Management" and "Owner"– except in the case of small businesses. The latest is probably explained by the fact that Owner and General Management positions are generally occupied by the same person (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Positions held by women managers in Madrid enterprises by size of company and by activity (% of women)**



As for the promotion of women, the data provided by Madrid enterprises (Table 5) show that it is directly proportional to the size of the company. In large companies there is a higher percentage of women who have been promoted because of the professional career opportunities that this type of organizations offer. However, taking into account the presence of women in senior positions in these companies, there are certain difficulties in career advancement from certain ranks.

**Table 5: Promotion of women according to company size (% enterprises)**

	Large enterprise	Medium enterprise	Small Enterprise	Microenterprise
Yes	45.9	44.5	19.2	9.7
No	35.1	46.2	78.9	89.5
Does not know	18.9	9.3	1.9	0.8

From the social sciences, the phenomenon of "glass ceiling" in women career advancement in management positions is explained referring to internal factors (e.g. social and directive skills, achievement motivation, ambition, among others), or external factors (e.g. organizational structure) of social and labour character (Castaño, 2009). The high dedication

that these jobs require in terms of time and the hard compatibility of these activities with other type of work establishes the existence of difficulties in reconciling work and family life.

Other aspects that negatively influence the career of a woman are, for example, the abandonment of the labor market for some time to provide care for children; 'homo-sociability', understood as the organizational corporate culture dominated by men, that explains that there are so few women; and variable and flexible schedules that were initially perceived as beneficial were often adverse because they prevent the delimitation of the borders between the hours that should be devoted to work and those that should be devoted to personal matters.

Executive women interviewed in the region of Madrid highlight the difficulties and efforts arising from the reconciliation of work and personal life. The tasks related to household and family care continue to fall on women, as stated by 81% of respondents. Given the current work environment characterized by requiring the physical presence at the workplace and long working hours, 54% of respondents say they pretty well agree that motherhood is a limiting factor for women to advance professionally to management positions. The issues that women managers consider that most difficult the professional development to management positions are (Table 6): the lack of spousal support (81%), the shift in priorities and career goals with motherhood (79%) and lack of effective reconciliation policies (79%).

**Table 6: Relevance of the barriers that limit the development of management skills for women**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of spousal / partner support	82
Change of priorities to work-maternity binomial	79
Lack of reconciliation policies	78
Lack of family support to the unexpected	77
Obligation to work full time / part-time limitation	74
Rigidity of schedules / lack of flexibility	73
High cost of childcare	73
Difficulty in reconciling family life with trips or destinations outside Spain	72
Lack of protection policies on the company to offset the imbalances that naturally causes the maternity	71
Difficulty in finding reliable domestic staff	65

Besides external factors, some of the interviewees stressed the importance of internal factors that hinder career advancement. Special emphasis was placed on the difficulty for some women in the delegation of aspects of family and personal life, perception of their own capabilities and self-esteem among others.

Therefore, the adoption of measures to enhance women's access to managerial positions is claimed by virtually all respondents. In relation to this aspect, it is worth mentioning the absence or lack of awareness of initiatives aimed at improving the employability of women in positions of responsibility by the companies in Madrid. As the data provided by the companies' survey show, 96% of organizations surveyed has no specific plans and policies aimed at enhancing the involvement of women in management positions and only 2% say they have them.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

The analysis of the results of the survey and interview process leads to the conclusion that there are differences in the valuation of the most relevant management skills between men and women, which promotes the differentiated development of specific competences and possible differences in exercise of management performance, according to Bass and Avolio (1994). The executive and expert women interviewed indicated as relevant in the development of their career the employment of management skills related to human relationships, emphasizing empathy and interpersonal relationships and negotiation skills to look for consensus solutions and to keep motivated and robust teams (behavioral competences).

Given the nature of the skills used by managers interviewed and the skills they consider important to be a good manager, it follows that the way to understand the direction by women is close to the features present in transformational leadership, in line with the work done by Rosener (1990), Druskat (1994), Eagly & Johanesen-Schmidt (2001) and Ramos, Sarrió, Barberá, & Candela (2002), among others. This type of leadership based on human relations is increasingly demanded by organizations, according to Bautista (2008).

Considering the current organizational structure, a number of skills and behaviors, not being generally used by women, hinder their career advancement. Among them stands out the use of networking, the visibilization of achievements and personal goals and the strategic vision. In addition it has been found that the lack of security and confidence in one's capacities together with an excessive self-criticism difficult career advancement, leading to women with great potential and desire to promote to remain in positions of lesser responsibility or even to abandon their career.

The presence and distribution of directives in the various positions in Madrid business organizations confirms the existence of an obstacle or barrier in the professional advancement of women within the organizational structure. There is scarcity of women in senior positions and concentration of them in middle management positions, according to Barberá, Ramos, Sarrió & Candela (2002). The presence of women according to the activity of the enterprise also shows the existence of horizontal segregation influencing the employability of women in certain sectors.

Among the factors influencing the performance and professional development of executive women, in addition to the ones characteristic of the organizations, stand out those related to the reconciliation of work and personal life, especially relevant for women with dependents in their care. The work related to housekeeping, the care and upbringing of children and elder continues to fall on women, which together with long working hours, high on-site hours and the difficulties in the delegation and assumption of such responsibilities greatly hinders compatibility of a career to senior management and personal and family life. Thus, socioeconomic factors such as interest in facilitating the employability of women and a social context favorable to the assumption of the changing role of women are factors conducive to the performance and professional development of women managers. This allows a gradual increase in female representation in the bodies of power and decision-making and the implementation of measures to that end.

Working lines considered in the initiatives identified at the national and international levels to encourage growth in the number of female managers and high directives on organizations and to ensure gender equity and diversity include the development of professional potential and strategic planning of professional career goals, the reconciliation of personal and professional life, training in skills and competences development, the promotion of professional and personal networking, stakeholders awareness raising and the recruitment and retention of talent. From these common working lines the main strategies and recommendations to businesses, organizations involved (associations of women

entrepreneurs, etc.) and public administrations are defined, considering they can be helpful for the development of competencies and executive skills as well as other factors that result in the professional development of women managers. These measures are complementary and should be approached from a holistic approach.

- Initiatives for professional potential development and strategic planning of personal goals through coaching processes. The aim is to set realistic career goals by taking advantage of skills and experience of the business managers themselves or other women.
- Mechanisms aimed at reconciling work and family by business organizations: flexible hours, telework promotion, access to in-house day care, flexibility to count the working hours on an annual basis instead of weekly to allow workers greater ability to organize, and promotion of shared responsibility in the maternity / paternity and dependents.
- Training for management skills development for women to improve their career prospects through courses of various kinds, from short seminars to postgraduate equivalent to 600 hours.
- Professional and personal networks facilitating the flow of information among women with great career potential in a noncompetitive environment where they can grow professionally and develop important relationships of friendship and alliance. These professional networks can occur internally in the company or with a more global scope by relationships between women of different nationalities, cultures and races but with a common goal of professional development.
- Awareness raising of other stakeholders, managing staff and senior through training courses on diversity issues implemented in business organizations. Not only it is important to affect change in mentality and attitude of women but also to help change the environment in which they are.
- Initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining female talent through strong relationships with universities and institutes, developing courses, making presentations, participating in panel discussions and creating recruitment campaigns aimed at campuses.

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